



## The Extraordinary World of Pu'u Ali'i

NOTES FROM  
THE FIELD

Our commute to work that day started early in the morning, when we left for the Kahului Airport on Maui. We got on a small plane and soon flew alongside towering and majestic sea cliffs. Directly below us was our destination of Pu'u Ali'i Forest in Kalaupapa National Historical Park, Moloka'i Island. Our charge was to conduct the first regular monitoring survey of the plant communities in this area. The crew will gather comprehensive data on the species present; tree, fern, and shrub density, woody debris, and canopy height. As I pondered this, it quickly became apparent to me that this is an extraordinary place that very few have the opportunity to explore.

The dramatic landscape of Moloka'i is complemented by the hospitable people. It is known as the "Friendly Isle," and I felt immediately welcomed in such a generous culture. Albert Espaniola of Kalaupapa NHP, played an integral role in our work at Pu'u Ali'i. Not only was he familiar with the trails and topography, but being from Moloka'i, he gave us a unique perspective of the island's history and an account of what it was like growing up there. His local knowledge of the area made it a safe, efficient, and enjoyable trip for

the I&M crew from Haleakalā and Hawai'i Volcanoes National Parks.

Although "Kalaupapa" is translated to mean "Flat Leaf," Pu'u Ali'i is anything BUT flat! The crew walked for miles along narrow ridges that dropped on either side with breathtaking views of East Moloka'i and the ocean. Deep valleys and overpowering mountains made the work day sometimes long and demanding, and we were forced to

ocean of uluhe (false staghorn ferns) and mud. With careful observations and deliberate steps, the crew established thirty vegetation monitoring plots.

Daily field work involved hiking great distances to given GPS locations where we set up the monitoring plots. The effort culminated in a description of the overall vegetation community. The resulting baseline data will be

used to guide management strategies, and assist in the preservation of this rare ecosystem.

I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in such a unique environment, and I look forward to returning to Kalaupapa National Historical Park soon. For now, deciphering the data from those plots while sitting

in my office brings back memories of vibrant sunsets, delicate 'awapuhiakanaloa (Hawaiian orchid), humbling skies, infinite shades of green, and impressive canopies of hāpu'u (tree ferns). The florescent lights in my office at Haleakalā National Park make me miss the extraordinary world of Pu'u Ali'i and the culture of Moloka'i.

—L. Moore, NPS  
Biological Technician



adapt to changing environmental conditions and unexpected obstacles. But the dramatic beauty and wonderful crew made the work enjoyable and achievable.

The diversity of vegetation that we surveyed in the wet forest environment at Pu'u Ali'i sometimes resembled a mystical world of native moss, ferns, and trees. At other times it felt like a claustrophobic